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Biotechnology

Western Australia Lifts Ban on GM Cotton

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Report Highlights:

The new Western Australian State Government has lifted the moratorium (imposed by the previous State government) on the commercial production of genetically modified cotton at the Ord River Irrigation Area in the State's north.

Includes PSD Changes: No
Includes Trade Matrix: No
Annual Report
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The new Western Australian (WA) State Government has lifted the moratorium (imposed by the previous State government) on the commercial production of genetically modified (GM) cotton at the Ord River Irrigation Area in the State's north.

The WA Agriculture and Food Minister, Terry Redman, said the decision had been taken after extensive GM cotton trials in the Ord River area during the last decade, under the supervision of the Office of the Gene Technology Regulator, Department of Agriculture and Food and CSIRO.

The trial crops have been very successful from a production point of view, yielding almost 11.5 bales a hectare. Over the years, trials of GM cotton in the Ord have frequently out-yielded production in other areas of Australia by about 10 per cent. The trials have shown that there are no agronomic problems, including the control of insects, in growing GM cotton in the Ord.

More than 90 per cent of Australia's cotton production is already GM.

WA tried growing non-GM cotton in the Ord in the 1970s but it was a disaster because of pest infestations requiring the spraying of pesticides up to 40 times each season. In comparison, the GM cotton trials have only required two spray applications with insecticides that are "far more environmentally-friendly than the now banned DDT used in the 1970s."

Mr. Redman said GM cotton could become a major new profitable industry for WA. A report released last year by the (previous) State Government-appointed reference group on GM crops estimated that GM cotton could be worth more than \$50million a year to the East Kimberley region, generating more than 200 full-time jobs.

The Minister sees GM cotton as an alternative crop option which will help secure the future of the Ord as a major agricultural region. He indicated that the decision to allow commercial production of GM cotton in WA provides growers with an opportunity to re-launch the cotton industry in WA and would also provide cotton growers facing severe water shortages in the Eastern States an alternative site that is well supplied with water all year round if they wished to relocate some of their operations to the Ord, providing relief to the Murray Darling system.